2: Schapera E-4, 5 (no date) 1930
FX13 Hottentot FX13
Nama

Chapter X

SOCIAL HABITS AND CUSTOMS

Mode of Life and Subsistence

Daily Routine

The Hottentots in their independent condition derived their food supply from their cattle, sheep, and goats, from the game which they hunted, and from the smaller animals and wild plants gathered in the veld. In recent years most of them have lost their cattle, partly through purchase by other peoples, partly as a result of the wars through which they have passed; and in some cases they have taken to living round mission stations, where they practise agriculture in a small way by growing wheat, millet, maize, pumpkins, beans, and similar crops.

None of the independent Hottentots, however, ever cultivated the soil. They were dependent in the first place upon their herds and flocks for their well-being. Their life in consequence was nomadic.[1] They were always compelled to seek out pasture lands where they could find grass for their animals and water sufficient for their own wants and those of their herds. They therefore moved up and down the country in certain definite areas, following the grass and the water. Grass as a rule was more easily found than water, hence we see the different tribes laying stress upon the possession of waterholes, and otherwise taking little care to define their boundaries more closely. Their main encampments were situated along river banks or in the neighbourhood of springs and deep pools, and always in parts where grass grew most abundantly.

Even to-day the more independent Nama families still lead a nomadic pastoral life. As long as there is sufficient water and grass, a number of separate families may camp together; but when the available supply does not suffice, the people prefer to scatter, and wander away in smaller groups. In normal years their wanderings in their pasture grounds are regulated for time and direction by the experience acquired in the course of many years. In dry years movement is more urgent and necessary, and more families than

[1] Schultze, *Aus Namaland und Kalahari*, 253–4; *idem*, "Südwestafrika," 208; Hoernlé, "South-West Africa as a Primitive Culture Area," 24.

10: Grevenbroek F-5 (ca. 1694) 1933
FX13 Hottentot FX13
Cape Hottentot

The more distant the veld is from us, the more grassy it is, the richer in plants, and the more suited to cultivation. It abounds in oxen and sheep and other animals, as well as every kind of wild beast, so that, as I have said, it is like a zoo; and the mountain glades are so full of huge creatures that there is little danger to man from lions or other wild animals, for there is everywhere ready for them to rend and tear a supply of victims both domesticated and wild which they can easily pounce upon with less danger to themselves than if they attacked men who are generally armed.

There are quarries, and the mountains are pregnant with various metals. Sometimes the soil is rich in gems. And the abundant shady woods and tall stout trees are suited for constructing both houses and ships. Also there are the many wild fruit trees which could without doubt be improved by cultivation. Among others I have seen a species of olive, often warmly praised but as yet, through what chance I know not, neglected. It may be that the method of cultivation is unknown, and that no one has been found who understands the manufacture of the oil.

Near us are many fields of various kinds; that is to say, in a length of one hundred feet you will often find three or four kinds of soil: there barren sand, there gravel, elsewhere clay, and then marsh, mud, flint and rocks. This is the reason, I think, that the ground under corn does not yield crops that ripen uniformly at the one time, but some patches are more advanced than others. So a farmer does not steadily carry out the mowing of the crops once he begins, but turning his reaping-hook from the unripe corn, he goes now along this furrow, now along that, selecting what is ready for the sickle.

The sun is rarely so hot as to scorch the crops; blight is still rarer. The women of the interior, to whose lot this task even at the present day, from old custom and ancestral precedent, still falls, do not dig the soil with mattock or dibble, but with a rake.

The natives on this side of the mountain enthusiastically hire out their labour for a modest wage, and toil more submissively than Spartan helots. They are apt in applying their hands to unfamiliar tasks. Thus they readily acquire the veterinary skill to cure scab in sheep, and they make faithful and efficient herds. They train oxen for use in ploughing; and if put in charge of a wagon, coach or cart, they are found exceedingly quick at inspanning or outspanning or guiding a team. Some of them are very accomplished riders, and have learned to break horses and master them. You would swear it was a Sarmatian galloping over the open plain. Runaways, vagrants and

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FX13 Hottentot FX13
Cape Hottentot

The soil, which is fruitful both of corn and wine, provides a copious plenty of provisions and supplies. It even yields tobacco, which, if it were cultivated, would rival the American. The grain crop is wonderfully abundant, the increase of the harvest being sometimes forty-fold. I count ninety-nine stalks and as many ears from one grain of wheat, and in one ear which I rubbed out there were seventy-five grains. This is an astonishing yield, equal even to that of Sicily.

I have it on reliable authority that there are wide plains bearing wild onions and other vegetables suitable for food, and huge tracts of land full of supplies, such as leeks, shallots, edible thistles, spring onions and garlick. I have myself seen fields full of ambugia, which I have sometimes gathered and found fit for eating, together with *asidull*(?) and wild asparagus of various species.

Fields have been shown to me which twenty years ago, and perhaps from the creation to that day, were a rude waste on which neither nature nor man had grown anything. But for the last twenty years they have been well sown, and with only two or three fallow periods in all that time, with no manure, and after the slightest turning of the surface with the plough, they have yielded an abundant harvest of wheat. At the time I saw them the corn was in the blade and promised a rich crop.

I remember that a sprig or cutting of an apple-tree two feet long took root when planted. A year later a slip was grafted on to it, and within the year it bore ripe fruit. Also a vine planted in June bore grapes the following December. Such fertility is unprecedented. But indeed all the fruits of other lands, those which genial Europe, fertile Asia, and America, the farmer's joy, pour from their open lap, can with few exceptions be seen flourishing here on our promontory and never disappointing the hopes of the husbandman.

I have seen heads of cabbage and marrows so big that hardly a pot could be found to hold them. The turnips here are equally large, so much so that I have used one for a stool when I got tired walking. Beets have been dug out of a bank in my presence so fleshy that they were as long and as thick as a man's arm. Such vegetables it has astonished me to behold, and the more so on finding them all deliciously flavoured.

Our vines here bear so well that a reliable farmer told me that in one vintage from eight hundred choice vines he got six casks (commonly called hogsheads) of excellent pale-red, dark-red, or yellow wine. And everybody assures me that the native vine produces so mellow a grape that